

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

SPRING 1960

SEVENTY FIVE CENTS



AN EPIC OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR BY JOHN NISBET

DULCE ET DECORUM

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 10 - Number 3

Spring 1960

Cover Design by Vernon Shaffer and Frank Boggs
based on engravings of the period

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

is published quarterly by the editors. Subscription rates are \$1.75 for one year and \$4.50 for three years. Manuscripts are solicited but cannot be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Address all correspondence to: The Editors, The Beloit Poetry Journal, Box 2, Beloit, Wisconsin.

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EPIC OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR BY JOHN NIST

DULCE ET DEORUM

BOOK TWO: SECOND MANASSAS



NOTE

The Fall-Winter Issue of the *Journal* for 1958 was devoted to Book One of John Nist's projected five-book Civil War epic, DULCE ET DECORUM. The completed work will have the form of a battle biography of Stonewall Jackson. The first book dealt with the Peninsula Campaign. Book Two, published here, carries the story forward another fateful step. It is the *Journal's* hope to present additional books as they become available.

The Editors

DULCE ET DECORUM

BOOK TWO: SECOND MANASSAS

1. Prelude

Six burning stallions have banged
 Their iron-shod hoofs on the golden stairs
 Of the sun; six pale ghosts in Confederate gray
 Have limped up the dusty roads of Virginia,
 Bloody feet wrapped in rags; six candled dreams
 Have winked their wicks in the wind and gone out
 In smoke behind the pools of fire in Stonewall
 Jackson's eyes; six weeks of waiting have puffed
 And burst in clouds of dust over the dry stubble
 And the parching fields; six new wounds have
 whispered

Through chapped lips at the heart of time:
 "The bull and the tiger have ripped at each other,
 And the china doll chatters Defense! Defense!
 And the circus master regroups and delays.
 But the slow seepage of strength may be fatal
 To chance: our only hope for transfusion is action.
 Maneuver and win, maneuver and win."
 Fierce, fierce is the heart of the eagle
 Ready to fly. Fierce, fierce is the tiger
 Crouching under his wings, safe for a time
 From the mad slashing horns of the bull.

Six ax handles have split in the hands
 Of the patient giant, six keen blades have blunted
 On the hard logic of fear, and the Kentucky
 Volunteer who drove guerrillas from Missouri
 Now sits down at the board to match chess moves
 With Lee: Major General John Pope, who said,
 "My headquarters are in the saddle."
 To which the grim deacon of Presbyterian humor
 Replied: "General Pope doesn't know his headquarters
 From his hindquarters!" A joke which the prairie
 Lawyer would have relished had not proof of its
 Truth tasted so much of unfictional death,
 For Stonewall Jackson was to break the sword
 Of this new blue commander like a desiccate twig.

Dim, dim the light of a waning moon,
 Shallow, shallow the undefended fords of the Rapidan
 As ragged hordes of spectral gray splash across.
 It is pre-dawn, Wednesday, August 20, 1862,
 And Marse Robert is on the move with cavalry,
 Artillery, and seven divisions and two unattached
 Brigades of infantry: some 55,000 apparitions
 Of potential violence in the silvery peace
 Of early morning. Pope, his army deployed along
 The Rappahannock River, anchors his right flank
 North at Rappahannock Station, his left flank south
 Near Kelly's Ford—a spread of about seven miles.
 Into this miniature England mapped by two rivers
 The Rebels lance northward in two wings:
 Jackson left, Longstreet right. And if Fredericksburg
 To the southeast is extreme tip of Kent
 And Rapidan Station to the southwest the outer edge

Of Cornwall, then evening finds the bull above
 London and the eagle halfway to Wales.
 To the north, along an imaginary Scottish border,
 Wheel from left to right the epic names of towns
 Soon to see the splendor of the peacock:
 Amissville, Waterloo, Warrenton, Catlett's Station.
 Thursday and Friday the gray locusts continue
 Their clouding flight, feeding upon what stubble
 Has been left by the Union Commissary—which
 means

That the Johnnies are hungry as usual,
 Their thin-lined bellies complaining to the August
 Dust that sticks to their limpsy-weak sweat.
 But that dust is kind to many veterans
 Of the Valley army: soft powder roads are easy
 On leatherless feet soon to bleed
 Upon thorns of assault at a railroad cut.

By Friday evening the Confederate left wing
 Has swung away from Wales on the fictive map
 Of tiny England and swooped to light near
 Jeffersonton at the Scottish border; the legs
 Of over 20,000 men ache in witness to the title
 Of foot cavalry. The Old Man has driven his
 Homespun heroes with typical impatience and skill.
 Meanwhile, the slower ambling bull has pawed
 And snorted several miles up the Rappahannock,
 And now he straddles Hazel Run, head-down, horns
 Flashing in the twilight at the left flank of Pope,
 Now pivoting at Rappahannock Station. The Federal
 Right flank, three miles from Waterloo, stands
 Threatened by the detached brigades of General Early,
 Ready at the first danger of an overwhelming rush
 By the men in blue to recross the river and unite
 With Jackson. And with the situation thus,
 The circus master thinks it time for the peacock
 To spread his tail and strut his stuff. So,
 In the brightly borrowed language of the Swan
 Of Avon—who will behold the royal captain of Lee's
 Cavalry? For forth he goes in a night more dark
 Than any he has ever seen before to capture
 In a tent at Catlett's Station the Yankee general's
 Coat (in exchange for a pair of pants that had left
 Beauty Stuart in underwear embarrassment a few
 days

Ago), several members of the Northern staff
 (Including Marse Robert's nephew, Louis Marshall),
 A mass of military papers, a dispatch book,
 And, best of all, a talkative blue quartermaster:
 Treasures bountiful enough to gladden the heart
 Of even the richest of inventive strategists.
 Ah, history, history, record with humor how a Union
 Chief with headquarters in the saddle was jabbed
 In surprise by a black ostrich plume in the rear!

2. Lee Makes His Decision

Marse Robert spent Saturday and Sunday sifting
 The wheat from the chaff in Stuart's spoils:
 Carefully, carefully he polished each grain of fact
 For the ration of truth he would serve his army,
 Wind-pudding surfeited on scuttlebutt conjecture.

Thus: 45,000 men has Pope,
 Without reserves from Burnside,
 But General McClellan offers him hope:
 Porter's corps flows north like a tide.

A big blue tide from the Rapidan
 To swamp us under on his left flank:
 My only course is move on, move on,
 And outmaneuver the waiting Yank.

Three kings stand on the checkerboard:
 I have one, but Pope has two,
 Yet I cannot drive between lord and lord
 As in a game I would have to—

In order to take without loss of my own.
 No, war is not simple turn-for-turn:
 Where flesh covers bright tactical bone,
 At close quarters gunpowder will burn.

So Zeno's myth on Achilles' arrow
 Is a lie from the very start:
 Mathematical vision of time is narrow—
 Hears not the *continuous* tick of the heart.

Thus if I slam between one and one,
 Like a child playing at red and black,
 That continuous tick will whisper me done

As McClellan slips a sword in my back.

To make route of their juncture longer, not shorter,
That right now is my major hope—
By left and rear draw this army from Porter,
Then burst in a storm upon lonely Pope.

Yes, and every square mile of fertile plain
That I can free from the Yankee grip
Means sides of bacon and bushels of grain
To fatten my starvelings for a threatening trip

Between the Union army and Washington town—
Or a thrust into the upper Potomac:
The same move that forced Lincoln to down
The high-flown strategy of little Mac.

Now who shall execute with force
This sweep around Pope to the promised land?
Stonewall Jackson's the choice, of course,
A god of war and my own right hand.

3. Lee And Jackson Confer

It is Sunday noon, August 24, and the big guns
Of the tiger are roaring to rout the Yankees
Massing on the east bank of the Rappahannock
At Warrenton Springs Ford: General Early has
united,

Unscathed, with the eagle, and the men in blue
Fear attack over the decoy bridge that Jackson has
Rebuilt. It is Sunday noon, and as A. P. Hill
Makes mimic thunder for a summer storm, the circus
Master writes a quiet letter to the china doll:
Tactfully, tactfully he asks for the remaining
Units of the Army of Northern Virginia. If Davis
Wishes to countermand the order, he may and can—
But the area of danger is no longer Richmond,
As Lee hopes the President is wise enough to see.
"Fear is improper motive for strategy," sighs
Marse Robert. Then he calls for a pair of smoldering
Old Testament eyes to appear and prophesy the sun
At a standstill, while walls crumble to trumpets
Blowing above fires of far-ranging assault.

It is Sunday noon, and Stonewall Jackson rides

With the wind to something more dear than a sermon—

A date with destiny in Jeffersonton. As the deacon From Lexington spurs Little Sorrel, he thinks:

"It is time, it is time. At last we will put

An end to the Lenten abstinence of inaction:

Resurrection of initiative is at hand—alleluia!

Alleluia! It is time, it is time. For the Lord

Reveals what is hidden through the open movements

Of men, and better it is to sweat and bleed

Than to kneel in our sackcloth among ashes and beat

The breast and weep for victory through prayer.

No, the vindication of justice is action:

What the will seeks, it must do. It is time,

It is time. And though I told Colonel Boteler

Not long ago that General Lee was a phenomenon

And that I would follow him anywhere blindfolded,

I did not mean to do so if the commander had to wear

The blinkers of Davis—no, what I meant was

That if my handsome friend was given the chance

To execute proper vision, he would see what I see.

It is time, it is time." And so it was.

Two generals stand in the yard of a frame house

In Jeffersonton; two generals stand and eye each

Other with respect: one father and the other son;

Two generals stand and find no fault with

Their relationship of elder and younger partners

In boom and blood. The elder thinks:

"How different this eagle is from the thin,

Wing-clipped, and feverish scarecrow who advised me

Against Malvern! Filled-out, feather-sleek,

Talon-sharp, beak-polished, flashing-eyed—

He is ready to fly straight to my objective,

Like a needle jumping north on a compass.

And how he loves to fly alone, his own master,

Swooping over field and hill and wood and river

To strike anything which stands between us

And our independence! He is already on the left,

Knows the country best, and his men will march

To the ends of the earth with him and then complain

That they have run out of new distances to conquer.

I must send him. It is time."

And the younger thinks: "Circus master, you are

Going to crack a bigger whip than you dared to

Before from fear of smashing the china doll.
 I can tell by the firmness in your voice,
 The determined set of your head, the lift
 To your shoulders. You have new confidence
 And vision to challenge the stagnant swamplands
 Of conservative politicians, who stifle and smother
 Assault. Fresh air at last. Yes, handsome friend,
 It is time."

Two generals stand in the yard of a frame house
 In Jeffersonton, and Lee says to Jackson: "I want
 You to take your three divisions, march up
 The Rappahannock, get in rear of Pope, and cut
 His communications with Washington. We will follow
 Just so soon as we have masked your advance."
 The *we* of Lee's reference is some 32,000 men
 Under Longstreet. Stonewall tingles with electric
 Excitement: 23,000 heroes on maneuver
 And the glorious chance to execute his long-delayed
 Dream: carry the war to the enemy! Lee reads
 The ecstasy in the eagle's eyes and smiles:
 He has weighed the criticism of his rashness
 In the balance of history and the scale has tipped
 In his favor. Dividing an army in the face
 Of the foe is always dangerous, but Lee knows
 That victory does not ask, "How much will it cost
 If I do?" but rather, "How much will it cost
 If I *don't*?" And so Marse Robert has his answer
 Ready for all who object: "Such criticism is obvious,
 But the disparity between the contending forces
 Renders the risks unavoidable." He is pleased
 With the reaction of Jackson—eloquent agreement
 On the rightness of his decision.
 Thus the son teaches the father.

Two generals stand in the yard of a frame house
 In Jeffersonton, and the younger draws in the dust
 With the toe of a boot: "Through Thoroughfare Gap
 In the Bull Run Mountains," he says in the high
 Pitch of taut anticipation, "down the Manassas Gap
 Railroad till we cut the Orange and Alexandria—
 At Bristoe Station and Manassas Junction."
 Lee looks at the two-pronged sword in Pope's back,
 The double tourniquet on his life's blood of supply
 And information from the capital. "Then he must
 Swim upstream," says Jackson, "or drown in lonely

Silence!" The heel of a boot stamps hard the dust
 And grinds. The elder feels heady wine of advantage
 Quicken his slower pulse and he says, "Good, good.
 I shall draw up my orders immediately."
 Thus the father learns from the son.

It is Sunday afternoon, and Stonewall Jackson rides
 With the wind: the resurrection of initiative
 Has come: alleluia! alleluia! It is Sunday
 Afternoon, and the gray-haired idol of a nation
 In error dictates his plans correctly: the tiger
 Is to continue to roar at Warrenton Springs Ford
 Until dark: that night the bull will relieve
 The tiger and cover the Rappahannock to Waterloo
 Bridge, four miles to the north: at dawn the eagle
 Will begin his flight with the divisions of Ewell,
 Taliaferro, and A. P. Hill: light marching order
 Will assure swiftness, for the eagle is to carry
 With him only his ordnance train, his ambulances,
 And a herd of cattle: meanwhile the peacock will
 Continue to fan his brilliant tail as a screen
 At Waterloo Bridge until the bull relieves him
 And the circus master shouts: "Now follow the
 eagle!"

It is Sunday night, and the big guns
 Of the irrepressible redhead are silent.
 The men of the Jackson corps are cooking
 Their three-day rations, and above the crackle
 Of campfires buzz the living tongues of many ghosts
 Soon to die: white, white are the faces, dark, dark
 Are the eyes of martyrs in gray tatters who say:
 "Where do you think we're going?"
 "To hell maybe." "Shucks, I don't mind—
 Not if Old Jack is there to lead us."
 "Yeah, we've been sitting on our haunches long
 enough."
 "I reckon we can't win the war by sitting."
 "You damn well bet we can't."
 "Time to move, I guess." Yes, it is time.

4. Army On The Move Again

Dawn of Monday, August 25, 1862, dawn
 And the Valley veterans begin their flank march.

Dawn and the men are complaining: seared bits
 Of beef are not much with which to line their bellies.
 Lean, lean the hunger that runs through their ranks,
 Crying: "Cornfields, ho!" But the ripening ears
 Are not ripe, and diarrhea rumbles brown
 In their bowels. Mile after mile the herd
 Of cattle thins out till not a horn remains
 For a rotten tooth to suck on. Mile after mile
 The dust clouds puff from the pacing feet,
 Blistering on soapless soles, wagging big toes
 Through the broken leather, swelling in grimy cotton
 Rags, or bleeding bare on pebbles and thorns:
 The famous foot cavalry is almost as poorly shod
 As an Indian pony. "Ah, but what the hell,"
 They say, "the Yanks up ahead will know we need
 Shoes—and Old Jack'll make them accommodating!"

O Muse of American History, too long silent
 In the attic of dead epics, help me now to sing
 Alive the fabulous movement of these men:
 Fifty-four miles in two days, fifty-four miles
 With the lion sun of summer clawing at their throats,
 The dry dust of August gritty in their teeth,
 The brittle clicking of cicadas a monotony
 Of sterile stone and parched grass in their dreams.
 Help me now to sing alive the half-coiled snake
 Of Jackson's maneuver, the route of his double-fanged
 Strike at the blue-veined lifeline of Pope.
 Recall now from the limbo of unredeemed time
 A past which is always present tense in the heart
 Of a poet and paint for his vision the gray serpent
 Sliding with sibilant poison through many a sleepy
 Town become heroic on the burning map of Virginia's
 Red *Iliad*: Amissville, Orlean, Salem, White Plains,
 Thoroughfare Gap, Gainesville, Groveton,
 New Market, Bristoe Station, and Manassas Junction.
 And with these names, O Muse of American History,
 Too long silent in the yellowing pages
 Of secondary abstracts of official reports,
 Help me now to sing alive the green hope of the eagle
 As evening flames brighter than blood in the Bull Run
 Mountains: the pass—ah, the pass is key to success.
 "And if it be not held in great strength
 By the Federals—" says Stonewall. Then he prays
 To the falling night that the Yankees may stand

Far to the south. Receive that prayer, O Muse
 Of American History, as it issues from the lips
 Of a general wearily mopping his brow at Salem
 While trudging troops cheer him in the sunset,
 For you have graced with attention many a word
 Of less moment and can scarcely do better now
 Than to weigh the heart of desire in genius
 On the scale of God's justice: the balance so heavy
 In favor of man will tip another way in less
 Than a year—shift from the glory of a mountain
 Sunset to the agony of a wooded moon.
 Let them cheer him, cheer him, at Salem.

Sunset and the Valley troops are cheering,
 But Ronald Sandford is no longer with them:
 The voice of that brave soul is stilled forever,
 And only the echo of tears behind the dull eyes
 And pale faces of his loved ones whispers the memory
 Of a heart that once murmured the intricate joys
 Of the flesh in their presence. (Eternity
 Of silence in an instant of words, infinite distance
 In a line shorter than a man's hand, blank chasm
 Of separation over which spans no bridge of touch
 On the neatly featured writing of a sheet of truth
 Thinner than a fingernail: *We regret to inform you...*
 Official regret in terms of genteel sympathy
 And polite correctness, and the light in a mother's
 Eyes shoots downward into the abysm of hell,
 Where night never sees the dawn. Official regret
 In phrases of trite patriotism and bloodless
 Sacrifice, and the proud square of a father's
 Shoulders rounds to the initial lash and the final
 Weight of a cross heavier than the gravity of all
 Blind earth sucking at the dry dugs of a murdered
 god.

Dear Christ, sweet Jesus, Saviour of the world,
 Sacred Love pinned to the dark center in a flaming
 Universe of every direction man's wayward will
 wheels

Bright upon, know You in Your black hour of agony
 Any report more sad, inept, or hollow than this,
 So eloquently vain, which patriotic and religious
 Men mouth fulsome with respect at the deaf departure
 Of The Almighty, Who always rends the veil
 In the temple of their blasphemy:

We regret to inform you?)

Sunset and the Valley troops are cheering,
 But their bearded idol signals them to be quiet:
 The amethyst mountains are a hymn in his blood
 And the incense of clouds is worship of sky
 For stars more brilliant than those on his collar.
 Sunset and the Valley troops march under raised hats:
 They will praise their commander in spite
 Of his order. Night and the Stonewall Brigade
 Huzzahs in the darkness. The eagle blinks and tugs
 At the reins of Little Sorrel: husky the voice as it
 Says, "Who could not win with such troops as these?"

Winslow Adams

The second day was long as the first,
 The going harder, sharper the thirst,
 But by mid-morning good news ran
 From the Bull Run Mountains to every man
 Trudging along in Jackson's van:
 The pass, the pass was undefended—
 The hope on which success depended.
 Not one blue picket in Thoroughfare Gap,
 And the gray snake on the burning map
 Slipped his fangs past every hill
 In the quickening pace of: Strike and kill!

Winslow Adams whistled to the sky
 And wondered how many men would die
 Before autumn stared with bleary eye
 At the green summer fire all rained away
 And bright gold turned to brown decay.
 "Quite a few, from the way it looks:
 The boys are reading their holy books
 And haven't a wink to give to sex
 Or a wet thumb to their dog-eared decks.
 Ah, but religion is always rife
 When a man's afraid of losing his life:
 Funny how one offers swearing breath
 To prayer in the awful presence of death."

Then the gambler smiled at his observation—
 If the Johnnies wanted to become a nation
 Of saints, what the hell did he care?
 After all, he had won more than his share

Of Confederate loot when the cards were clean
 And the rattle of dice far from the keen
 Of some wild charge at the Yanks up ahead.
 "And if they're content to play virtuous dead
 To the siren call of the vice of chance—
 When this raid's through, they'll fish their pants
 For the copper coins of an opening bet
 And the folding stuff of a final regret
 That conscience skedaddled out the back door
 Of their chapel converted to a bargain store
 So my account in St. Louis can grow some more."

He envisioned supplies at the railroad track
 And shifted the blanket roll on his back
 And said to the kid, limping along on swollen feet
 Raw with dust and the August heat
 Lancing up through the holes in his shoes:
 "Cheer up, Tommy; there'll be plenty of booze
 And leather and delicate things to eat
 When we surprise the Yanks and cook their meat.
 Bless Old Jack—he'll fill our bellies
 With chicken and taters and berry jellies."
 Then Winslow Adams winked an eye
 And whistled a merry tune to the sky,
 While Tommy agreed that Old Jack would
 And thought the corporal better than good:
 "For you, dear friend, I could die, could die."

Father Charles Martel

The little hammer rode his nag and remembered
 death.
 Not death in whistling iron and kicking steed
 And screaming blood. But death in purple face
 And bulging eye, once hooded to the hangman's noose.
 Death in three thieves, who jerked and twisted
 To the last spasm of the rigid rod,
 Wetting homespun gray with the seed of life
 Denied—because of their desertion. Three thieves,
 Who stole away from war and the stern discipline
 Of the Virginia stone: the bearded patriarch
 With sword for spine, who said above his silent
 Prayer of duty to the executed souls—"Let this
 Be a lesson to all who contemplate abandoning
 Their country in her darkest hour." So it was—

A lesson in the letter of the law which Jackson
 Served with passionate and full commitment:
 Desertion meant a rope about the neck,
 A purple face, a bulging eye, a rigid rod,
 And dark wet of life denied on homespun gray.
 Then dust from hundreds of feet slow shuffling by
 The blindly staring dead that fear might dangle
 In the hearts of those, bankrupt of discipline,
 Who thought of stealing time away from war.
 Three thieves, three ropes, three crosses.

The little hammer rode his nag and remembered
 death.

And the nails within his palms were those
 Of conscience: conscience that cried he had not
 Lifted one feeble plea to save three coward voices
 From the strangling silence of the noose.
 Yes, the Old Man had every right by all the laws
 Of military discipline to separate the soul
 From flesh because six legs ran faster than three
 Hearts away from thunder-vomit of big brass-O
 mouths

And gaseous iron bellies—but so had Pilate
 Every right to wash his hands when the world
 Would have no king but Caesar, though that same
 world

Screamed only the idiolect idolatry of self.
 No, there was no excuse for his not having pled
 The cause of mercy in the very language of the God
 Whom Stonewall Jackson worshipped behind the mask
 Of Southern Joshua: *Father, forgive them,*
For they know not what they do.

And this sharp lack of baptismal innocence
 Was spiked fist upon the *mea-culpa* breast
 Of Father Charles Martel, who rode in chilly
 Darkness, though the August sun was hot and bright
 Above the dust clouds puffing on the way
 To Bristoe Station and Manassas Junction:
 Down long echoing corridors of goodbye
 I ride alone in an empty night
 Without one star of earthly hope to light
 Me toward the dawning of hello.
 And my poor motley heart bled white
 As leprosy believes not where to go
 Now that her self-wick'd candle faith

Has guttered out on winds of death
 From war's dark altar of eternal: No!
 And if God's tears, more terrible than sin,
 Did not mirror mourning eyes more bright
 Than any diamond sun within
 The black lining of a cassock'd mind—
 My naked soul should stumble blind
 And cease to will to be any I.
 And all I am to be would die.

The little hammer rode his nag and remembered
 death.

But with the prayers of penance that he mumbled
 To plop-plop of hoofs, he vowed there'd be no more
 Of purple face and bulging eye and wet of life
 Denied from rigid rod on homespun gray
 Without his having swung the symbol of his name
 Against the sterile hardness of the Virginia stone.

Dr. Butler Wade

The surgeon with cold diamond on his chest sat
 An ambulance and tried to paint behind his shaded
 eyes

A strange masculine face that would complete
 The meaning of his mother's neatly written words:
 "Cousin Katherine has married with a colonel
 In the Yankee cavalry—one Richard Thomas, Boston
 Born and bred, a Harvard man, with strong
 connections

At the State House and senatorial backing in D. C.
 War, it seems, will serve to further his political
 Ambition, and Katherine, as you know, has always
 Been a head-toss child enamoured of position
 To go with the promise of her father's wealth.
 I doubt that she can call this union love,
 For the colonel, so we hear, is twenty years
 Her elder. Thus, Butler dearest, you must be content
 To let the vulgar dead bury their vulgar dead."

But he was not content, for he had seen too much
 Of the actual dead to find the least live comfort
 In some poetry from the Bible. No, the dead
 Were here, and the dead marched on, their bellies
 Full of thick clay to keep their corn-thin bowels

From bleeding them to a fly-stung cot and a soggy
 Blanket over pale pinched nose and sunken eyes.
 No, the dead were always here, marching marching
 Marching to the mowing season of man, when file
 On file went down before the reaping scythe of shot
 And shell—but never to what one in decency could
 Call a burial, for they were only hid with hurry
 In a hole, as though the stupid sun would see
 Such things that it were better not to have to look
 Upon. No, by some perverse blind irony of fate,
 The dead were all alive and only the living marched
 And marched to the drums of the dead. The men who
 Puffed the dust clouds on the road were dead,
 All dead. And he who sat his ambulance and tried
 To paint a face behind his shaded eyes was dead.
 All dead and thinking, "If only I can live
 The slaughter out," like some frightened girl
 Clutching her doll as comfort against the horrible
 Bright light of a screaming dream that shook her
 Sweating up from let-go peace to grasping war
 Before a kindly father came to light a candle
 In the night and say, "All is well," and she could
 Let go into darkness once again. Yes, the dead
 All clutched their dolls and cried because they
 Did not love enough to free the faith that would
 Let go, let go themselves into the peace of life—
 Else why should he, the doctor thought, feel cold
 Diamond on his chest, mute symbol of the fact
 That only the living can bury the dead.

O ever since the world began
 Small, small has been the heart of man,
 And long before the world shall end
 Cold, cold must be the love of friend.
 That's why I wear a silver chain
 And a diamond more sharp than pain—
 To teach myself how the living dead
 Salt with tears sweet daily bread.

Roger Tecknor

The microcosm of all misery marched and sweated
 To his dream of brown bottles of root beer chilling
 In a mountain brook, while water nymphs danced
 Upon a green hill, lithe limbs serpentining

In an invitation to invade the bushing hive
 Of human honey. Ah, gelatin dessert of sex,
 How sweet you taste upon imagination's palate—
 Red raspberries winking on vanilla cones of cream!
 But Roger Tecknor's saccharine tooth of lust
 Was quinine bitter when he chewed upon the moldy
 Hardtack of remembrance: three broken necks
 With black welts—and the steel-gray eyes of Lucifer
 Let out of hell to terrify all butterball deserters
 With the fact of death. Oh, how he hated Stonewall
 Jackson for the noose that waited at the end
 Of every dream of brown bottles of root beer chilling
 In a mountain brook, while lithe limbs danced
 Upon a green hill of—water, water always flowing
 Indistinct at last beneath his mind and drowning
 Every light by which he saw escape to Gertrude
 And the cherry peaks of love. If only he were not
 Too cowardly to play the coward well! If he were
 Not, why, when the guns began to talk in terms
 Of mutilation for the brave (and no one dared
 To answer: "Where are you in this wild and
 agonizing

Conference with blood?"), then he would muzzle off
 A toe or bayonet a leg and limp away from war
 On convalescent leave—never to return,
 Except by money paid to some heroic fool willing
 To substitute. But he was far too cowardly
 To play the coward well: the very thought
 Of performing some red violence upon himself
 And he was weaker than the blind white worm
 Of masculine satiety . . .

Black welt of death I would forget,
 The mind of fear is a broken back
 That carries hope in a furry sack
 And drowns her in the eye of regret.

Hempen noose which blinds the day,
 I must not look at dangling feet
 Meant to stroll on Heartwell Street,
 For mine may turn and run away.

Sam Stover

The Atlanta blacksmith clucked at his mules

And called the Yanks 50,000 fools
 For letting the Rebels get in their rear
 And skin them out of more than underwear—
 Who the hell wanted longjohn cotton
 When the dead August air was rotten
 With heat? Ah, but the gin and bitters!
 (Enough to give even Old Jack the titters
 From the secret joy of cooling refreshment!)
 And the staples of less heady nourishment.
 That was the vision in the well-trained eye
 Of this sweating sergeant of supply,
 Who saw by experience the rails up ahead
 Would yield him more than a loaf of bread.
 Then Sam sang out loud and clear,
 While the lieutenant grinned from ear to ear:

O the man who says his heart is cleft,
 Though he's known the pleasure of sin,
 Is agrievin' for the woman he left
 And will drown his sorrow in gin.

And the man who claims his joy is gone,
 Though he's heard the squeakin' of a bed,
 Is asleepin' alone when breaks the dawn—
 With the gurgle of a bottle in his head.

So, pretty girl, when you see the sky,
 And remember me—don't wet your eye,
 'Cause I'm married now to Yankee rye,
 And I'll drink their whiskey till I die.

O the man who says his dream is dim,
 Though he's lit many candles in the hall,
 Is asorrowin' for breast and limb
 And will fire his grief with alcohol.

And the man who claims his love is vain,
 Though he's held more than pillows in a bed,
 Is asleepin' alone in an ammunition train—
 With the thunder of a bottle in his head.

So, pretty girl, when you see the sky,
 And remember me—don't wet your eye,
 'Cause I'm married now to Yankee rye,
 And I'll drink their whiskey till I die.

As Sam sang, how he wished he could!

A shot of captured liquor would do him good
 Against the dust and the sweat and the heat
 That set a brushfire to his leathered feet
 Resting on the driver planks of his wagon—
 Too long empty had been his flagon.
 But when a cranky mule lost one of his shoes,
 The swearing sergeant forgot about booze.

Willis Hyatt

In a trance of love, the poet walked the dust
 On calloused feet—his shoes had long since holed
 Themselves to worthless scrap. But there was
 Kindness in the powdered road, and he remembered
 Smilingly a freckled kid in overalls, with fishing
 Pole across his shoulder, luxuriating in
 The puffing warmth between his toes as he glided
 Whistling down a shadowed lane to the glassy bosom
 Of the lazy river and the dark streak of a sleepy
 Catfish that would waken to his baited hook.
 How cool the mud along the bank! How silver wet
 The water coins that spun in flashing arcs
 From the gyring leap of the great catch that bent
 His bamboo with ecstatic weight! How sweet
 The flaky meat fried golden brown in butter!
 Ah, the rifle and the blanket roll were feathered
 Lightness in his dream, and on his tongue the taste
 Was other than the choking grit of war.
 Return, return he did in joy to life that was not
 Scarred by the heart-thump hoofs of the black
 Stallion Matti rode down every void of his regret.
 But when the captain called a halt for rest,
 Then Willis Hyatt found his boyhood past as helpless
 To divert him from the present pain of poetry
 As prayer for rain from cloudless skies:
 The latest lines from Matti blocked his one escape:

Barren of its furniture of love
 My heart is empty now that you have gone:
 No vase on any table flowers
 With the springtime of your smile
 No clock chimes the idle hours
 We used to dream upon
 And every mirror in every hall

Stands leaden blank as winter skies.
 Without the golden summer of your eyes
 The blood of the dying harvest sun
 Dries on the withered leaves of night
 And I curse the lack of light
 As I pace the shadows of the moon.

God, God, he thought, how beautiful her mind!
 More beautiful than any eyeless vision on his inner
 Sight, more eloquent than any secret laughter
 In the throat of yesterday. Yes, and all that
 Passionate intensity was his—his, if only he
 Could take some lead or iron non-fatal to his flesh
 And give it back to a surgeon's knife before he left
 For home and marriage to a meteor more bright
 Than any far-off planet of red-handed Mars.
 O shooting star of love, he thought, you trail
 More brilliant poetry across the heart than I!

Then suddenly the brow-mopping was over,
 And the Rebel columns were sweating once again
 Along the road, and Willis Hyatt marched
 On calloused feet, while a pulsing trance spoke
 Something of an answer to his question of "If only—"

O words are feeble contact
 And yet not overmuch:
 How else shall I draw you
 Into closer touch?

You a child of heaven
 And sister to the sun
 Are word of God in flesh
 For human two made one.

And though my flesh may never
 Marry you blood and breath
 Yet within your eyes, love,
 My soul is wed till death.

And since your eyes can fashion
 Such union in a home
 Free from earthly passion
 Let them read this poem

And learn the simple truth
 That lives beyond that day

When winds of fire shall come, love,
And burn my heart away:

O words are feeble contact
And yet not overmuch:
How else shall I draw you
Into closer touch?

Bradley Carleton

Below the creaking of the gun carriages
And the rattling of the caissons, Major Bradley
Carleton heard the rumble of approaching rain
In Richmond, the Richmond of six weeks ago,
When Aunt Marian lettered him to come
To the blind-drawn parlor of her love—and there,
Ah, there he found the blackest hair and eyes
And whitest soul in all his world of lost; Agape.
Agape, who had double-missioned up to the capital
To tell him that Prince George was dead of secondary
Complications following the amputation of both legs
After the Battle of Cross Keys (O small engagement
That singled out so few individual roomers
Of the graven stone!) and that his father wished
Him well and hoped that he'd remember home
When next there came his leave. No man can squeeze
Clear water from a rock, and Brad refused to tap
A muddy spring: he could not play at grief
For brother George, for they were never close
In life and he would not permit in death
The intimacy of tears. As for his father, what
Was done was done, and he had reached the point
Of no return: let the plantation of the dead
And dying remain without an heir to give it life,
For all his world was lost when Captain Floyd
Fell blind to Yankee lightning. (How could he say
He hated why he fought?—to save a prison
For the quiet feet of one who wore the blackest
Hair and eyes and whitest soul in all his world
Of death.) Let the corpse lie still.

Below the creaking of the gun carriages
And the rattling of the caissons, Major Bradley
Carleton heard the whisper of his ripe-olive-colored
Dream: "Do not dig a grave for charity

Within the churchyard of your heart.”
 And though the sun of August madness blazed upon
 The lathered mules, once again he saw July
 And the dim lamps of sanity within the blind-drawn
 Parlor at Aunt Marian's and the sorrowful face
 Of Magdalen, come down to pray him out of hell:

Child of the dark eyes
 Child of the darker hair
 Why do you surprise
 The lion in his lair?
 What demon of the upper air
 Has led you down the winding stair
 To where this beast roars out the hell
 Of my most secret heart?
 What angelic art
 Has taught your hands to ring the bell
 That opens wide the flesh-locked door?
 And upon what holy feet
 Do you walk the flaming floor
 And make the lion bleat?

Below the dust that choked his spit and the salt
 That stung his parching lips, Major Bradley Carleton
 Tasted the honeyed mouth of her who was his world
 Of love—O Agape, who melted candied joy
 Upon his jaded tongue! But as he shifted stiffly
 On his mount, he felt again the sword of separation
 In his soul: the sweetness of his quadroom dream
 Was legally forbidden to his bitter sense
 Of duty in a lost world of white propriety:

When love which should be peace is war
 The heart of man which should be whole
 Breaks open like a blistered sore
 And all nerve centers in the brain
 Flash alarms of raiding pain
 Till brute despair signs armistice
 Of amputation in the soul.

Yes, yes, he'd done the right thing after all:
 Refused to lead her further into promises
 Of their belonging to each other beyond all
 Differences of pigment in the skin. Yes, yes,
 He'd done the right thing after all: said goodbye
 When Jackson called for quick departure north

And independent action far removed from sultry
 Quarrels of Hill and Longstreet in the Richmond
 Camps. Yes, yes, he'd done the right thing
 After all. But below the creaking of the gun carriages
 And the rattling of the caissons, Major Bradley
 Carleton heard the rumble of approaching rain
 And the hissing sorrow of goodbye, and as he
 Listened, a ghostly tap of hammers nailed a shrouded
 Coffin shut on all his world of lost:

Threatened under cloudy skies,
 We stood and spoke our last goodbyes,
 As every idiot on the street
 Hurried past on careless feet—
 Not knowing what we felt.
 And when your eyes began to melt,
 I knew well what it is to die
 From the dark thorn of a lyric cry
 That feeds upon the heart.
 I said, "Beloved, let us part,
 And never meet again."
 You whispered something of the pain,
 And on the instant there was rain,
 And suddenly my face was wet.
 Live a million years, I won't forget
 How love trembled on that day
 I had to give my life away.
 Nor shall I find a thing so fair
 As pearls of grief upon your hair.

5. A Double Fang In Pope's Back

By Tuesday evening, August 26, the general
 Who drove his men till many fainted on the road
 Had taken Bristoe Station. After a nap
 In a rocking chair, an order for Sandie Pendleton
 To arrest and prefer charges against a lax brigadier,
 The eagle with eyes for war saw to it
 That two trains were wrecked, a bridge burned,
 And rails torn up: Pope's supply line now hung
 Achingly in air—like a dislocated shoulder.
 But there was laughter for the Rebels who had caused
 The pain: a Washington politico, his leg shattered
 By the plunge of cars over an embankment, lay
 By the fire of his captors and requested sight

Of the famous Confederate chief. One look
 From his propped-up position at the dingy scarecrow
 With capbill down to the nose and he groaned:
 "O my God! Lay me down!" This Yankee cry
 Of disappointment echoed through the gray ranks
 For days; then Willis Hyatt wrote:

We got a general named Old Jack:
 His uniform is a mangy sack
 And his beard a dirty flag,
 But he fights with more than stars on rag
 And carries the army on his back.

So let all Washington call him clown
 And think him ugly as sin,
 For no matter what the bombproofs say,
 Their laughter won't drive Jack away,
 And the men in blue need more to win
 Than "O my God! Lay me down!"

We got a general named Old Jack:
 His eagle eyes are harder than tack
 And his sword brighter than the sun,
 And when he raises an arm for attack—
 O how the goddam Yankees run!

So let all Washington call him clown
 And think him ugly as sin,
 For no matter what the bombproofs say,
 Their laughter won't drive Jack away,
 And the men in blue need more to win
 Than "O my God! Lay me down!"

While most of the Valley veterans laid themselves
 Down for the sleep of exhaustion, Trimble's brigade—
 Stiff, footsore, and swearing—filed wearily through
 The midnight darkness toward Manassas Junction.
 But resentment turned to holiday humor
 When the supply station fell and yielded treasures
 Any Rebel Aladdin would pray the jinni of his magic
 Lamp to give: coffee, sugar, molasses, whiskey,
 Brandy, and shoes. Wednesday, August 27, was a day
 Of plunder at both places where the Southern serpent
 Sank his fangs—though poison from the strike
 Swelled knots of anger in the throats of surgeons:
 Precious packages of morphine and chloroform

Flew wildly from the eager hands bent on grasping
 Slower but more pleasant means of reducing
 Consciousness and breaking the dull links
 Of day-after-day monotony. Understandable this
 Maniacal thirst for liquor was to Dr. Butler Wade,
 But it was not excusable: nothing could excuse
 The consequences from the waste of merciful drugs:
 The damp pale clay of shock, the egg-yolk eyes
 Of pain, the short shrill screams and long-drawn
 Tapering groans, the silent blankets over faces
 Blind as cloudy marble to the mounds of arms
 And legs, the heavy thump and light patter of earth
 Upon the dead. His temper a short-fused shrapnel
 Ball for days, Butler exploded into action
 At the sight of this destruction of the Yankee
 Anodynes, and in a thunderhead of rage he rode
 To split the Old Man's ears with fork-tongued
 Lightning: "General Jackson, sir, this crime
 Against the casualties to come must cease—
 Immediately!" "And so it shall," said Stonewall—
 Pleased with fire from one so youngly handsome
 And so finely bred. "Not two minutes past I gave
 Orders for all the liquor to be poured out upon
 The ground—what earth drinks will not intoxicate
 My men to wilder plunder. And now, good captain,
 I suggest you oversee collection of the drugs.
 My compliments, sir, for your devotion
 To your high calling as minister unto suffering."
 And with that, the eagle flapped his wings
 And startled Little Sorrel into a gallop toward
 The area of confusion. The doctor, shaken
 At the boldness of his own approach, without
 A by-your-leave to his superiors, sat dumb a while—
 And then the knowledge of success released the fist
 Within his throat. With tears of idiotic joy
 Upon his face, he whooped and bellowed
 Like a schoolboy at the bell that rang a summerlong
 Vacation from the squeaking chalk and sums
 Upon the dusty board: by God, the Presbyterian
 Steel was human after all!
 By God, Old Jack was flesh and blood!

Sam Stover saw the dry dirt suck the whiskey down,
 While ragamuffins knelt and scooped and lapped
 At puddles of aromatic amber, then wept and cursed

As their salvation drained away. Sam Stover saw
 The dry dirt suck the whiskey down, while a club
 Of panic struck him in his barrel chest: by God,
 Old Jack would medicine the ground and leave
 This sergeant sickly for a month! A sin it was
 To waste the remedy a good Lord had provided for
 The chills and fevers! War wasn't worth
 A temperance tract without a touch of fragrance
 On the lips of those who fought to see the South
 Go free! Sam Stover saw the dry dirt suck the
 whiskey

Down and choked on righteous rage: "We ain't going
 To whip them on their lemonade!" But a badly
 Misinformed brigade of Jersey Yankees proved to be
 A deus-ex-machina escape from apoplexy at the loss
 Of liquor for the blacksmith from Atlanta.

Bradley Carleton deployed guns and men,
 Ordered the roar of action again,
 And wondered why Yankees had to die
 Under the blue peace of an August sky.
 "Because some ass of a general blundered,"
 He told himself. Then his cannon thundered
 Flame-burst mastery of the day,
 And the enemy lines melted fast away.
 But on and on came the Jersey Brigade,
 As though it were seeking a scrap of shade
 Under the very muzzles of the guns
 In which to hide from their mimic suns.
 As the Federals came and the Federals died,
 Something in Bradley Carleton cried,
 "Shame!" against the murderous will
 That called *hero* the heart that could kill.
 Then he looked at his men and saw them well,
 The men who blackened themselves in hell,
 The men who sweated before his eye
 And rammed the charge that split the sky,
 The men who would certainly bleed and die
 And let replacements fill the shoes
 Of Bradley Carleton's ghostly crews.
 Yes, green they were and awkward of move,
 But time with the hungry mouths would prove
 What lessons of death could be learned,
 And the same fire that at Malvern burned
 Would ripen the green to a harvest brown

For the scythe that mowed Rebel batteries down,
Then the major looked at the torn brigade
And wished to Christ it would find its shade.

Stonewall Jackson wished so too, for he rode
Into the open and waved a white handkerchief:
For the first and only time in his career
The eagle did not care to beak and talon the enemy
Into carrion. "Surrender or be annihilated!"
He shouted above the strange and sudden quiet
Of cease-fire. The Yankees answered with a sniper's
Bullet that whined among the Rebel aides. Up jerked
The wings of the imperial bird, and the bulldog
Batteries growled and gnawed their iron bones.
Virginia fields were sown with the bloody seed
Of New Jersey flesh. Soon courage dissolved
Like rock salt in a flood of summer tears, and blue
Terror poured across a railroad bridge and collected
In a pool of panting weakness in a wood.
When the smoke of battle cleared, three hundred
Sullen Union prisoners herded to the rear
Of Jackson's lines, and the Old Man changed
His mind about the liquor: with Northern troops
In such proximity, the Johnny starvelings had better
Take the Federal Commissary for everything
That they could get. "Plunder," he said.
And plunder they did.

While Sam Stover blessed the wagons
That hauled away whiskey for the Rebel flagons,
Roger Tecknor munched on Christmas candy
And washed it down with English brandy—
Treats with which to celebrate quiet
After the artillery's deafening riot.
While Butler Wade helped catalog drugs
And slapped and swore at the August bugs,
Willis Hyatt slipped his calloused feet
Into a pair of Yankee shoes. "Neat, neat,"
He said, not knowing that friendly leather
Would carry him through a hostile weather
And over sharp stone roads of Maryland
To Antietam Creek and a desperate stand
By a country church and a riddled field
Where valor died but would not yield.
While Tommy Roule danced in new brown boots

And pierced the ear with high-pitched hoots
 At General Pope and his Potomac slows
 ("With these I'll tramp on all our foes!")—
 Unaware that less than a month away
 In the volcanic blast of a September day
 At a fence not far from the Bloody Lane
 One of Hooker's bullets would split his brain—
 While Tommy Roule danced and showered smokes
 On tobacco thirsts, he laughed at the jokes
 Of the sharp-eyed gambler, who sang a ditty
 To honor this rape of the Northern bitty:
 "If your mouth is dry and you'd like it moister,
 Just wrap your tongue round this pickled oyster;
 If a weak pulse has made your color pallid,
 Then brighten it up on a lobster salad;
 If your hungry eyes have lost their shine,
 Restore their sparkle with Burgundy wine;
 And if you feel your hat's full of lead,
 This Yankee coffee'll clear your head!
 Come, get it, men; it's ours to take,
 And we'll dine and drink at the Union wake.
 Here's to their corps of supply—what a pal!
 Oh, it's done much more for Southern morale
 Than if we had drowned Little Mac in the James.
 Yes, war is business, but it's also games,
 And the next time the sabers rattle
 And Old Jack's lemon waves us into battle,
 We'll fight like hell and kill like sin,
 And not because we just have to win,
 But because we want to put our hands in
 The knapsacks fuller than ours have been!"

As Winslow Adams regaled the gallant urchins
 Of his company, Stonewall Jackson decided on a move:
 With enemy pressure mounting by the minute, he sent
 Ewell and Early on to Manassas Junction. Then he
 Himself withdrew that night to the dusty woods
 Near the Henry House Hill at Groveton, where he
 would

Wait for Lee and Longstreet and their summer storm.

6. The Battle At Groveton

The Battle at Groveton was a minor engagement,
 According to history. But for those who came again

To the house and the hill where two armed mobs
 Had fought a year before, with memories littering
 The mind with debris of death and the actual hand
 Of a skeleton (not buried deep enough for the wind
 And the rain of a winter past) pointing the way
 To present peril, the judgment of history was
 Of no concern—for casualties do not ask whether
 Major or minor: gangrene from thorn in a foot
 Can maim as surely as the booming belch of cannon.
 Yes, the Battle at Groveton was a minor engagement,
 But, Spirit of History, do not chant it loud
 To the ghost of Dick Ewell, for the lisp
 Executive jaybird would hop on his wooden leg
 And blister the air with his blue invective.
 "Nine months of inaction for me," he would say,
 "And all because of this *minor* engagement!"
 And what of John Neff and Lawson Botts,
 The Virginia colonels killed at Groveton?
 And what of the 200 lost from the Stonewall Brigade?
 And the 173 of the Twenty-First Georgia?
 No, Spirit of History, if you must label this battle,
 Do it in whispers: otherwise the shadow of a flesh
 Wound in General Taliaferro might hear and object:
 "When blood burns in the eyes, all the world
 Of sight runs red! No more of *minor* engagement!"

Thursday morning, August 28, and Stonewall Jackson
 Waits for the onslaught of Pope, and he waits alone,
 For Lee and Longstreet are still in the mountains—
 Many miles away. Thursday morning, and the Valley
 Veterans pack themselves like herring in a barrel
 Into a silt-powdered woodland behind an obsolete
 Railroad cut on a hillside. So close is the jam
 Of foot cavalry that officers can scarcely find
 Room to ride between the long snaking rows
 Of stacked arms. Thursday morning, and already
 The air is heavy with heat; the men, safe for a time
 From the stinging sweat of the sun, stretch out
 On the shade and josh and play at a few hands
 Of cards: "High, low, jack, and the game."
 No Jew's-harp twangs, no harmonica hums, no banjo
 Plunks a ripply consolation: the Old Man has
 Forbidden all music, and voices so used to the keen
 And the shout must murmur pianissimo joy.

Thursday

Morning, and the woods hum like a gigantic hive.

While Tommy Roule took time to hone
 His bayonet fine with spit on stone,
 Winslow Adams flipped a deck with a grin
 For all the boys who cared to sin:
 "Come on, fellas, let's have a game—
 Now we have time. It's a rotten shame
 Old Jack won't let us rest today,
 But long before dark we'll up and away
 To attack anything in a Union suit—
 And probably spoil our supper to boot.
 So until we charge in the cannonball sun,
 Who's for a friendly turn at Twenty-one?"
 A few agreed, but the stakes were low,
 And the gnats of waiting droned dull and slow.

Thursday noon, and fortified with a glass
 Of buttermilk, Old Jack rides alone in open
 Reconnaissance: for hours the eagle flies
 In ever-widening circles, inspecting the build-up
 Of the Yankee front. The blue lines slither
 To salient, stop, and fan to right and left.
 Little Sorrel gallops and trots, gallops and trots,
 Comes to a halt, wheels, then gallops and trots.
 The hand of his rider tightens and loosens the reins,
 As the current of thought charges high or low
 In the restless mind behind the flashing eyes:
 Wait or attack? wait or attack?
 Flows the question now.

Spirit of History, let a voice from the past
 Speak in this silence before the blast;
 Let an aide on the staff, shorn of his fleece
 By the wolf of temper, speak his piece;
 See, he keeps his distance out of fear—
 Let him speak: Old Jack won't hear.

*Front and center, young man. Now say
 What chilled you to tremble that August day?*

Simple—for all who can understand:
 A blade of ice in the general's eye
 And the wind from a wave of his hand
 Froze me out of the summer land,

And I rode in a winter sky.
I rode in a winter sky.

Ah, he was mean, he was mean, that day—
Savage and cruel as a widow bear
When she finds the cubs she had left at play
Lured by the hunter's bait away—
And he wanted no officer there.
He wanted no officer there.

Black was his mood—a powder keg:
And if a subordinate wanted to die,
All he needed to do was approach and beg
Old Jack for an order that he could leg,
And the bang would blow him high.
The bang would blow him high.

Thursday afternoon, and cold, cold is the mind
Of Stonewall Jackson as he rides and observes.
If he lets Pope mass for a big assault, his Johnny
Rebs are in trouble—what with Lee and Longstreet
A day behind in the mountains. The odds are at least
Five-to-two against him, and he must shake the poise
Of the hand that holds advantage: hurl his
Lightning-tipped spear against the iron shield
Of the North and send the burly warrior reeling back,
Then choose his ground and hope the delay
In counterattack will be long enough for
reinforcements

To arrive. Thursday afternoon, and cold, cold
Is the mind of Stonewall Jackson as he rides
To decision: offense is the one best chance he has
For survival in the tiger sun and the stifling
Close-quarter fury of fang and claw. He must take
That chance now. Thursday afternoon, and Stonewall
Jackson growls at his brigadiers: "Gentlemen,
Bring out your men." High, low, jack, and the game
Has ended; boom, blood, death, and burial begins:

Willis Hyatt knew what he was in for
When Old Jack's orders made the men roar
Like lions suddenly let out of a cage—
At the scent of blood, they were wild with rage.
Five hundred yards off stood the Yankee files,
But distance is relative—twenty miles
Was more like it when shells were flying

And earth-geysers spouting and casualties crying
 In that curdling key of the damned.
 On the crest of the hill Rebel gunners rammed
 Their charges home, and the big mouths slammed
 Death on a whistle over the cut for track
 That lured the massive blue lines to attack.
 And as Willis Hyatt ran out of the wood
 And the safety of shade, he was in for it good—
 Or bad, according to a true definition—
 And his only hope was that his ammunition
 Would last at least until darkness fell
 On these few torn, heaving acres of hell.

Then the poet fired and keened with the men
 Across a field, through an orchard, and back again—
 To hug the earth on his empty belly
 (He had vomited everything out when he found
 His new shoes red from brains on the ground)
 And wonder why his hands felt clumsy as jelly
 As he loaded and shot with an insane will
 At the angry strangers stumbling up his hill.
 For hours on end time hung suspended—
 And then on a sudden the battle was ended:
 Gone the noise and the smoke and the flame,
 Present only the panting exhaustion and shame—
 Shame at malice of murder so great in the fight
 That terror now welcomed the blankets of night.

Once upon a peace ago
 Before an anger wolfed my spleen
 And conscience gnawed my marrowed bones
 I skipped the brook with silvered stones
 While hedgerows of innocence grew green
 In the rounding light
 And at every joy their tufts of snow
 Would track the wind with white.

Now upon a world at bay
 Behind a weather of the dead
 I huddle in a yawning rack
 And weigh the thunder on my back
 While crossbows of crime shoot comets red
 At constricting dark
 And with every fire the dogs of prey
 Lift their jerking legs and bark.

7. The Eagle Has To Fight Alone

Friday, August 29, was the first day of Second
 Manassas, the day that Stonewall Jackson held
 His tissue-thin lines with deadly courage
 And escaped disaster by the narrow margin of genius,
 The day that assured the morrow's routing of Pope
 And the later collapse of Confederate command
 That would break the gray waves of assault
 On the rocky ridge of a Pennsylvania town.
 Friday, August 29, was the first day
 That Robert E. Lee turned his back in mistake
 On Longstreet, the day that the genteel hand
 Sheathed a sword while the bull snorted and bellowed
 Demands for delay, the day that the circus master
 Ignored the sharpness of horns that would gore him
 In less than a year, for this was the day
 When the brute learned his fatal lesson: stubborn
 Refusal to act by a trusted subordinate cleaves
 A dark tactical chink in the bright armor
 Of strategy so that the superior yields
 To the wear of his underling's breastplate.
 In the great paling rose of daybreak,
 Huge hard-scaled blue worms squirmed and fed upon
 The blossomed light, flashing peril to the rising sun.
 A bearded scarecrow sat his horse upon a hill
 And watched their writhing menace for a while.
 Then Stonewall Jackson hurled the shockbolt
 Of his orders through the ranks: *Pull back*
And regroup. Back ebbed the gray tide
 Of yesterday's assault, leaving grotesque shingles
 Of human flesh upon the beach of war: the dead,
 According to the testimony of the living, lay
 In rows so straight they looked like regiments
 At rest before the storm of "Charge!" would blow
 Them into action. The dead who fastened now
 A strangling trap upon the squeaking mouse
 That stared with beady eyes from Roger Tecknor's
 Heart. God, God, how bad the day before had been!
 Running, always running, like some bony nag
 Upon a treadmill of eternity, with the lash
 Of a merciless master mingling thin blood
 With lathered sweat. Running, always running,
 With solid plunks dropping screaming bundles
 Of rags to left and right, and nowhere in a world

Of madness for his cowardice to hide. And then
 The horror of that orchard, where bayonets
 And rifle butts swung crazy arcs of death above
 The trampling feet, feet that cider-pressed ripe
 Apples down the throat of thirsting earth.
 And then that shell which burst and blinded him
 With rotten fruit. If only he had kept his sphincter
 Shut! God, God, the ignominy of the mess!—
 And what was worse, the brutal laughter of the men.
 Laughter, always laughter, in a midnight world
 Where the squeaking mouse suffocated in a trap.
 God, God, how bad the day before had been!

Roger Tecknor, poor atom of disgrace, was one
 Anxiety among so many squeezed inside a narrow
 front,

Three thousand yards across. From a slender height
 Behind the line that bristled along the obsolescent
 Railroad cut, the cannon grinned upon the strength
 Of Old Jack's choice: from this position,
 Though outnumbered heavily, the Johnny Rebs could
 Ask a near bankrupting price for victory from
 The Willie Yanks. One weakness only offered
 Any hope for those who would attack the eagle
 In his mountain nest: a woods could cover
 Any flanking movement against the left.
 But A. P. Hill, the tiger, double-filed his six
 Brigades to counter any thrusts from hunters
 Who were out for ivory fangs. General Lawton,
 Substituting for the one-legged jaybird, who
 Would not hop again in martial rage till Gettysburg,
 Split his force—one half to hold the center,
 The other to protect right flank, beyond the men
 Of General Starke, who fought in place of wounded
 Taliaferro. For most its length, the line looked
 Down a perfect field of fire—a pasture sloping
 Into Young's Brook. Here then the Old Man made
 His stand and waited for some reassuring dust clouds
 Puffing on the Warrenton Road. Till Lee
 And Longstreet joined him, he could do no more.

Ah, eagle, eagle, historians remember
 A movement of military rarity:
 Through parched brown fields of approaching
 September

You sent your surgeons on a mission of charity.

The Yankee wounded lay suffering, untended,
On the bloody ground of the Groveton slaughter,
Till the Rebel doctors came and befriended
Them with bandages, sutures, and water.

Water, ah, water, precious gift to men
Burning with thirst at every hole of shame,
Sweet baptism flowing through the butcher's pen,
You are a kiss of love in Christ's name.

Dr. Butler Wade did all he could
For prisoners carted off to the wood—
He had ministered to gray all night before,
And now he worked on blue patients of war.
But flesh already stank—purple and green:
The tell-tale signs of maiming gangrene.
Though his head ached and his eyes were raw,
He labored tenderly to fulfill the law
Of his oath—but, God, how he hated
The fact that attention was so belated,
That many died who might have been saved
If only the Northern stars had behaved
With a gleam of mercy towards pain.
Then he thought of the crashing iron rain
That was sure to pound more men to pieces:
“So soon as this operation ceases,
A series of new ones will then begin,
For exhausted surgeons can never win
Their continual battle against death.”
Then he gulped some coffee, caught his breath,
And probed for a minie in a Yankee leg,
While bloodshot eyes screamed a silent beg:
“Please, please, don't hurt me any worse.”
And Butler answered above his curse:
“Son, you're lucky that bullet missed the bone—
Now clamp down hard on this little stone.”
Dammit! Why don't they care for their own?

At nine o'clock that morning, the eagle sent
The peacock to establish contact with the bull
And to assure the safe arrival of his flashing horns
Along the flank of General Early, at the extreme
Right of the Confederate line. Meanwhile,
The time passed quietly: a modest cough or two

From nervous rifles, an occasional clearing
 Of the throat from bolder cannon. Rebel eyes
 Grew bored with watching static Union power
 And shifted focus to the Warrenton Road,
 Where dust clouds signaled friendly strength
 Dynamically at hand (if Old Jack could have tapped
 Such strength upon that day, how much greater
 The morrow's victory would have been!—but the *if's*
 Of history are ever beggars crying in the rain).
 By ten-thirty Longstreet's hard-baked gingerbread
 Veterans, hot and heavily powdered from the August
 Ovens, were swinging off the highway into position
 At a wide angle to the front of battle—over 30,000
 Entrees, far more bilious than even the ambitious
 Appetite of success-famished Pope could stand
 To swallow. And as the bull pawed and shook
 Sharp ivory on their flank, the eagle's nestlings
 Rose to look at long light flashing messages
 Of hope: "By God, they've come! By God, we'll smash
 The Yankees after all!" Vain, vain their expectations,
 For they did not know how late, how very late
 Their hell would run before Old Peter found
 The time to move, and thousands of the dead
 Would never know. Never.

Sam Stover, hauling up shells to the batteries,
 Hadn't cocked an ear to the lieutenant's flatteries—
 He had known forever what it was to work,
 And if the scared youngster wanted to shirk
 Duty—well, it was no skin off the sergeant's ass.
 "Long as he hangs to the rear, he'll eat my sass,"
 Said the blacksmith driving his sweating mules
 To the corporal beside him. "War's full of fools
 Too afraid to die and too unfit to live."
 "Yeah," said the corporal. "What I wouldn't give
 To stick a bayonet in his tired behind!"
 Sam snorted with pleasure. "Aw, never mind;
 We'll tote the stuff and win the battle
 And let Old V. M. I. just strut and rattle
 His sword—all he's good for is paint and stencil
 On Government Issue—that and wet lead pencil
 On an Official Report to the Colonel of Supply."
 The corporal lifted a leg and then let fly:
 "There's a Yankee shot in the lieutenant's eye!"
 "Yankee shot, hell!" said Sam with a grin,

“That’s a Rebel bomb to blow the whole front in!
 Take it easy, Luke; war’s full of fools,
 And I don’t want your wind panicking the mules.”
 Then the wagons creaked to the top of the hill:
 “All right, boys, unload ’em for the kill!”

With 50,000 blue devils facing Old Jack’s 23,000
 Gray, the odds for a kill were all in favor
 Of the Yankees, though their first attack was light
 Enough: one small regiment against the Rebel center,
 Lonely, unprotected, torn to pieces once its gallant
 Major fell beyond all hearing of the Presbyterian’s
 Sermon to a lenient Alabama captain: “No, captain.
 The men are right. Kill the brave ones. They lead
 On the others.” Kill the brave ones they did.
 The brave and the timid, the veterans and the raw
 Replacements, the bearded and the clean shaven,
 The learned and the ignorant, the high and the low:
 North Carolina bayoneting Pennsylvania, Virginia
 Cannonading Ohio. Kill the brave ones they did,
 And they in turn were killed by the brave,
 For with the death of the mounted major, the fields
 And the woods sprouted wave after wave of bluecoats,
 Exploding out of broken earth like toadstools
 After a warm spring rain. Ah, but these Northern
 Toadstools were deadly: Bearing the poison of hatred
 In their heads, the thunder of murder in their hearts!
 And they made a mess for Old Jack.

Hot, hot became the hunt for the tiger; close, close
 The presence of success. A gap of a hundred yards
 Or more had been left in the line of the defensive
 Jaws: fang and claw ripped on each side of the gap,
 But a deep bank of the railroad cut masked
 The enemy build-up for a thrust to the heart
 Of the fierce-fighting beast. Quick, quick
 The protective ditch filled with the blue hail
 Of death—then it overflowed and the storm broke
 And the ice pellets hit, safe in the wooded shade
 From the melting heat of Southern cannon,
 And the tiger roared at the slash that narrowly
 Missed his vitals. Then the eagle swooped to support,
 And his steel-wielding reserves swept the ground
 Free of the hail. Red, red the tracks
 Of their ghastly work.

As the Federal attacks rose and fell,
 Bradley Carleton had nothing to sell
 One half so precious as what he bought
 For Old Jack in the market of hell:
 The lives and the minutes with which he fought.

Fought in the hope that the bull on his flank
 Would cease to crop the green grass of his rank
 And lower his horns for a blue impaling,
 But morning passed, and the brown weeds stank
 Where the batteries reddened with noisy failing.

Failing to shatter the massed Yankee blades
 That knifed out of the glare and into the shades
 Of the woods where the tiger roared hotly at bay:
 Protected, protected by a leafy army of aides,
 And the major felt a sudden chill on the day.

Day that could forfeit all advantages won
 By the chafe and the puff of this corps on a run
 Round the Union right. "A perhaps can be fact,"
 Said Bradley Carleton to the twelve o'clock sun,
 As he wondered: "Why in hell doesn't Longstreet
 act?"

History has asked that question, too, but the answer
 Is easy: Old Peter simply refused to obey Marse
 Robert. Time and again that afternoon, Lee,
 From his post on a commanding hill, urged Longstreet
 To attack: the eagle, his wings of maneuver clipped,
 Pinned down in his defensive nest, hung on alone
 By thinnest margins of courage and undaunted will
 To resist. Time and again the bull snorted:
 "The ground is too forbidding, and the day is nigh
 Gone. Let us rather advance on a forced
 Reconnaissance, get our troops into the most
 Favorable positions, and attack in the morning."
 And the courtly soul of this gentlemen's war
 Agreed to the tragic delay. O circus master,
 You have lost today the magic whip of command!

Barefoot Georgia, barefoot Georgia, you left
 Your bloody prints among thorns and briars
 At the railroad cut, but you hurled back the hunters
 Out for the hide of the tiger. Thunderless
 North Carolina, thunderless North Carolina, you

Held your line with the bayonet and dashed out
 Under fire to strip enemy dead and wounded
 Of their cartridge boxes so that you might return
 The crackle of lightning. Stonewall, fully aware
 Of his peril, rode here and there, inviting death
 That would not come, commanding, inspiring,
 Exhorting. Then he said to the redhead: "General
 Hill, your men have done nobly. If you are attacked
 Again, you will beat back the enemy." Hill humph'd
 As though he were asked the impossible and rode
 Down his front. Old Jack shouted behind him:
 "I'll expect you to beat them!"

Thus on the static heat of an August day, the first
 Flash of tension between the eagle and the tiger.

Winslow Adams and Tommy Roule
 Wished that the terrible fire would cool—
 The fire through which they'd run for hours,
 Choking on stench of the hideous flowers
 That blossomed red on a world of dust.
 The Yanks had tried to do it or bust,
 And late in the day still tried to do it—
 And if they did, Marse Robert would rue it,
 For he and the bull long long had been
 Where they could take the enemy in.
 But Adams and Roule wasted not a thought
 On grand strategy—seven hours they'd fought
 On little of water and less of food,
 And guessed somehow what they'd done was good
 For Old Jack and his corps en masse.
 Now they lay on their backs in rancid grass,
 Their bayonets lifting bright to the sky:
 "If the blue men come, then here they'll die."
 This the only promise exhaustion could make
 To the grim reserves on a march for the break
 In the line, where Sam Stover cursed and led
 An attack of stones on any Yankee head
 That tried to pop to the top of the hill:
 Frantically brutal was the boulder kill—
 Especially after Luke rolled crazily down
 The bank, missing half his thin-haired crown
 Because a Yankee sword had sheared the day:
 "Goddam bastards, I'll make you pay!"
 Screamed the sweating sergeant of supply,
 As the sun reeled red on the lens of his eye.

Sam had taken it upon himself
 To leave his wagons on a casual shelf
 Of peace, where foliage could feed his mules,
 While he tried to stop the 50,000 fools
 From putting an end to the gallant stand
 By the beggarly heroes of Dixie Land.
 On through the twilight and into the night
 The blacksmith hammered away in the fight:
 He shot and clubbed and choked and slashed
 Till the last anvil of resistance was smashed
 By a personal fury too strong to contain
 And ecstatic rage oblivious to pain
 That he should have felt from the red tide
 Which a Northern knife had ripped in his side.

Whitebeards many years later remembered how
 Old Jack rode his lines that evening,
 His high-pitched voice so taut with pleading:
 "Two hours, men. Just two hours. Can you stand
 It for two hours more?" And death piled high
 Upon death, and hell cried out to hell,
 And from the quiet Paradise of age years later,
 Whitebeards remembered that blessed promise
 In the challenge of the high-pitched voice:
 "Just half an hour, men. Surely we can bear it
 As long as that." Bear it they did, and every
 August the long bloody sun of Second Manassas
 Hallows the brown stubbled fields suddenly green
 With the legend of their unparching sacrifice.
 Spirit of History, be kind to the memory
 Of this hour, for rare, rare is its beauty
 In the annals of terror. Wrong, wrong
 Though the man and his cause may have been,
 Pure, pure was his motive as soldier, and until
 The heart learns a new lesson of courage,
 Surely, Spirit of History, you can bear the bright
 Stabbing pain in the memory of this hour.

8. Aftermath Of The First Day

Midnight and the guns are silent, the deafening brag
 Of their killing reduced to the modest whisper
 Of flames in the eyes of the watch, pacing in glassy
 Stares of fatigue to the whine of mosquitoes,

The mourning of gnats, the open-mouthed breathing
 Of men too tired to dream of the glory in triumph.
 Midnight and the Rebel host counts its loss,
 For war which honors also grieves. Stark, stark
 The list of the dead and the down: gone forty
 Officers and six hundred men under Gregg;
 Wounded Generals Field, Forno, Pender, and Trimble;
 Missing half of the 13th South Carolina. Midnight
 And Hunter McGuire chants a litany of the doomed
 To the eagle, perched by his fire, while Jim,
 The slave, kettles some coffee: "Willy Preston,
 Mortally wounded." *Willy Preston Mortally . . .*
 And suddenly the stars are drunk in the sky,
 And oppressive darkness wheels blindly about them,
 As Jim drops an empty pot, jarring the little circle
 Of the staff with a metal ring and the wool-headed
 Thud of his body: the groans of Africa, dark
 Continent of sorrow torn out of the sea, organ
 Minor strains to the sunken moon, while Old Jack's
 Face twitches in convulsive madness and his eyes
 Burn brands of hell on McGuire's naked soul.
Willy Preston Mortally . . . And the bony talons
 Of the eagle bite deep in the shoulders of his aide,
 And a husky scream rips the Negro music asunder:
 "Food, fool, fool, McGuire! Why did you let him
 Out of your sight!" Midnight and fear knows no
 Answer to questions of why Willy Preston, son
 Of Stonewall Jackson's friends and neighbors, boy
 From Lexington, who had won the general's heart,
 Why Willy Preston, not yet grown to man, should die.
 Midnight and pain reels out into darkness,
 There to deal with its heartbreak alone.
Willy Preston Mortally Wounded.

While Stonewall Jackson knelt in a wood and wrestled
 With the Will of God, Sam Stover lay upon a table
 In a jack-o-lantern tent and watched the moths
 A sleepy orderly beat back from the flickering light.
 Shadows breathed the life of moans and whispered
 Comfort, as a stitch of teeth-clenching sharpness
 Fed upon his side. "You sure you don't want
 A little morphine, sergeant?" asked groggy Butler
 Wade. Cut and sew, cut and sew. All morning
 On the Yankees, all afternoon and night
 Upon the Rebs. And still no end, no end to suffering,

Which all the coffee in the world within a fagged
 Out doctor's brain could not begin to ease.
 "Hell, yes," said Sam; "I'm sure. Save that stuff
 For those who need it. I'll wet my whistle
 With another shot of Northern rye." The captain
 Smiled. By all the gods of medicine at once,
 This Georgia blacksmith was stronger than the
 ten-day

Smell from his armpits! "You keep on drinking
 That rotgut fire and there won't be a cannonball
 In this or any war that can pierce your crusty hide."
 "Well, now," Sam grinned, "immunity like that's
 Worth more than fifty anvils made of solid gold."
 Then the worms of sickly light squirmed once again
 Within his head and marbles of stinging sweat
 Rolled in his eyes. A damp cloth muffled his groan,
 And the stitch of teeth-clenching sharpness fed
 Upon his side.

While Sam Stover minced haltingly his giant way
 Through darkness to the wagon bed whereon he'd
 sleep,

Because he didn't want to take a cot from one more
 Painfully in need of field hospital care than he,
 The frightened jelly that was Roger Tecknor's soul
 Lay in a blanket mold of shame and stared
 Unseeingly at countless needle points of light
 Upon the quilt of heaven. Though it was smothering
 Hot that night, with not a sigh of wind to stir
 The dry sandpaper grass, he shivered under wool;
 Though he was drained of all energy except
 The necessary one to breathe, his rabbit's heart
 Kept hopping through bladed underbrush in wild
 Attempts to lose the yelping hounds, forever fresh
 Upon the scent of bleeding game. Try as he might,
 He couldn't quite dissolve the sour dream that kept
 Him from sweet sleep: the hot slimy serpentining
 Entrails of a dead bay mare kept strangling
 His imagination with red-blue strings of snotted
 Stench. And now as he remembered crawling into
 The carcass cave which he had hollowed out in that
 Dead horse, he somehow wished that diarrhea
 And nausea had not emptied his insides, for had they
 Not, he might not now feel, oh, so hopeless sick.
 God, God, what lengths a man would go to save

His hide from skinning by the knife of war!
 And if a pair of smoldering eyes set in some
 Yellow-fanged Johnny's face had seen the bloody
 Child emerge from that strange womb of battle,
 Then his life in the company was worth a cat's
 Thrown in a tub of scalding water. Oh, if—
 But no! no! no! The thought was more than he
 Could bear, and being so, he told himself
 Unceasingly it was impossible. How too too cruel
 That anyone should know his shame. And as he
 Turned unseeing eyes away from stars to retch dry
 Nothing at the tinder earth, his quarry heart
 Thumped panick'd code upon the night: *Nobody*
knows!

Nobody knows! Nobody knows! Nobody knows!
Nobody . . .

While Roger Tecknor heaved hot agony that would not
 Flow, the poet Willis Hyatt lipped a cypress wood
 Canteen and tongued a pencil for some lines within
 His ledger book. The day had been far worse than
 Any he had ever known, and now before he turned
 To sleep, he would erase chaotic images of hate
 With ordered words of love upon a page. Let death
 Howl all the devils out of hell—they could not
 Dance about the fire of life that sang of liquid
 Beauty from the springs of Paradise:

I will not walk with chalk in the eyes
 And tears in the bones
 For the storm in my blood
 Is a lightning rod
 Divining peace
 In the chrism of your kiss
 And in the presence of a love like this
 (Your heart, most sweet!)
 My heart will not beat
 Tom-tom tales to the idle stones
 Or the laboring skies
 Or walk alone with chalk in the eyes
 And tears in the bones.

While Willis Hyatt wrote his poem, Major Bradley
 Carleton twisted in his blankets and jerked
 Wide-eyed awake to stare at stars and wonder what

The dawn would bring. Somehow he felt like
 Shipwreck on a sandbar, looking for the winds
 Of morning and a rising tide to carry him far out
 To sea, where death lay singing in the cool green
 Depths of drowning jade. Back, back he went
 In memory to a time when Christmas gulls wheeled
 And swung in tongueless cries above a purple fire
 That ringed the burnished rippling metal
 Of the Gulf, waiting like an emperor's patient gong
 For the golden mallet of the sun to strike and tune
 To crystal harmony. Christmas dawn in Florida
 When he was twelve: hundreds of tiny silver fish
 Flipped in sparkling agony upon the beach,
 While two male sandcrabs dueled like armored knights
 In deadly jealousy for the attentions of a mate.
 Then the gulls swooped and knifed across the lacy
 Whispering hem of the sea to gorge themselves
 On helpless spangles washed out of the glittering
 Garment of the Gulf. The throaty sweetness
 Of his mother said, "You see, my son, how death
 Is but a narrow phase in the broad purposes of life.
 The higher feeds upon the lower till everything
 Becomes a sacrifice upon the table of the Lord."
 But Bradley did not see, for tears blinded him
 To all but the strange sad beauty of this hour.
 Only pigtailed Agape could answer with ripe-olive-
 Colored faith. And now that voice which pleased
 His mother so must be forever still within his heart
 Because of vision paler than his skin. But memory
 Was dark, and as the major stared at night, a cloud
 Of smoky questions burned like incense in his blood:

When stars spin and reel from the sky
 And comets no more tail and kite
 On earth's taut whirling string of light
 Shall lovers lie in the broken sun
 Like silver fish on the beach of night?

When galaxies and systems fly
 In one last blinding flash of air
 To the vast blank of an empty stare
 Unbroken by the image of any sun
 Shall every candle in love's eye
 Flare to roaring smoke and die
 Like thunder tapered to a sigh?

Or in that bright explosive end
 Shall everything the heart called fair
 Spin back on a reel of sunless light
 And wax to the flesh of tapered air
 Emptied of thunder smoke and wind
 And taught to comet tail and kite
 Like silver fish on a string of sky
 Canded to love in the image of God's eye?

Midnight and Stonewall Jackson kneels to find
 Some final remedy for the thorns in Bradley
 Carleton's blooming heart. The death of Willy
 Preston is once again the bitter knowledge
 Of a cross upon the eagle's back: the terrible
 Responsibility for names within the casualty lists,
 The awful weight of war. This new-cut epitaph
 Draws blood from scabs Old Jack had hoped were
 Healed to painless scars: parents, wife, two
 Children gone, and now this son, who did not bear
 His name, but wore his heart like a suit of Sunday
 Best on all the weekdays of a love eternally
 At prayer. But prayer, though answered by the God
 Of sorrow, learns at last the meaning of *Thy Will*,
Not mine, and Stonewall says above his dusty beard:
 "Heavenly Father, always Thou hast taken objects
 Of my joy from me that I might learn to love them
 In Thee, not Thee in them. Always, always Thou
 Hast taken, and my soul remembers Thou art just."
 And as the bony knees press hard in earth,
 The weakness of the flesh cries out for strength,
 The strength which dares admit the weakness:

When a hurricane eye
 Blinds the face of night
 And the moon drowns
 In a raging sky
 And the sea churns
 To explosive light
 And the universe
 Bangs and blows apart,
 Dear Christ, rehearse
 One last Gennesaret in me
 And be
 God walking on the waters

Of my stricken heart.

Midnight and Stonewall Jackson turns away
From darkness; soon the eagle perches with his aides
Before the campfire. The chastened McGuire lifts
His lips from coffee in a tin cup and says, "We have
Won this battle by the hardest kind of fighting."
"No," says Stonewall Jackson in a gentle voice. "No,
We have won it by the blessing of Almighty God."

9. Lee Crushes Pope

Saturday, August 30, dawn walked quietly in saffron
Robe, tracking the sky with coral. The Plain
Of Manassas lay dry as powder, not a breath
Of a breeze on the dewless grass. Random shells
Tore the still blanket of heat, and puffs of white
Smoke whispered man-made fires on the tinder earth.
The oppressive sense of imminent explosion hung
Heavily in air rotten with the promise of spontaneous
Combustion—but not more heavily than in the heart
Of Father Charles Martel, desiccate as sin itself.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi: misere nobis
Was his plea at morning Mass, but the desert
In his soul sprang no oasis. Never, never had he
Felt so like a rock immune to cleaving lightning
From a staff of faith. All night he'd ministered
To anguish of the flesh, and yet no ivory face
Of Christ smiled grace upon the work. Instead
The dark red Tempter laughed and said: "For every
Breath of life a hundred sighs of death. Six
Converts in a month of war, and you have lost
That peace which seals the labor of a saint. Ah,
Little Hammer, you are such a fool to strike
And strike when every blow means your damnation!"
But strike he would, though rapacious mouths
Of near despair should suck him down to hell,
And as he placed the Church's daily bread upon
The burning tongues of love, he cried in silence
Through his mumbled prayer (*Corpus Domini nostri
Jesu Christi custodiat . . .*) the terrible separation
Of his private Calvary: *My God, My God, Why hast
Thou forsaken me?* If any answer rustled in the tent,
The far-off hollow slam of a signal gun absorbed

Its fruitful music into sterile noise, and watered
Wine gave no relief from throatless thirst.

In the beginning was the cannon:

No eye eyes the brain-burst red
That sheds the secret blood unshed,
But seeing not, eye sees all well,
Knows not the gush of fountained hell.

No ear hears the cryless cry
Of some sick soul about to die:
Ear hears silence of outward breath
Infinity from anguished death.

No tongue tongues the stinging salt
From unwept tears of mortal fault:
Tongue savors not that inner waste
Embitters sorrow's very taste.

No sense senses Godless grief
That grieves and grieves without relief;
Nor can eye, ear, tongue impart
A sweetness to the quinine heart.

Outside the tent of sacrifice, the priest bade
Farewell to his tiny congregation: "The Lord go
With you, men." "Oh, He will, Father, never you
Fear. One more battle and we'll have General Pope
On a barbecue spit. Old Dutch'll save us all today—
Just one more battle and the Yankees'll be through."
The little hammer smiled at their simplicity,
The smile of some sad angel looking on the confidence
Of Eve in conference with the serpent. He dared
Not show them his inward tears:

O words are cheap and blood is dear,
So stop your idle prattle;
No man can save this world of fear
With one more battle.

This world is lost and lost will be
Until the end of day:
At noon a young god climbed a tree,
And every savior ran away.

Roger Tecknor, savior of himself, had run away,
And now he woke to a sharp elbow in his ribs
And the hairy yellow face of nightmare jeeringly

Come true: "I saw you what you did, you fat lousy Son of a bitch!" Blood drained away from Tecknor's Heart and emptiness beat hollow air. The sergeant Sneered: "You try to pull a stunt like that today And I'll kill you where you crawl! No matter where You go, remember, my bayonet is leveled at Your spineless back." Then yellow face and hair Strode off to rouse the company to hardtack, coffee, And the cry of death. Maggots of panick'd hate Wriggled in the fat man's bowels: what business had That three-striped officious ass have of spying on A man of genius! Oh, piss, piss, piss, how he Despised that brave superiority which could not Blink an eye at one admittedly no hero. Roger The Dodger tried to comfort himself with the thought That heroism is for the dead, but terror would not Let him be at peace: "God, God, what will they do? Bucking, gagging, or the lash? Surely, surely, Not the rope—not hanging. Why, they wouldn't dare!"

But hyperbolic pity said they would.

While Roger Tecknor agonized his private fate,
The Rebel lines right-angled martial menace
On a front four miles in length. With 55,000 men
Deployed like pincers of a giant crab, Old Jack
Felt certain Pope would not attack, but the blue
General with headquarters in the saddle had not
Ridden any herd of identification on the bull.
Thus the right steel jaw of the circus master's
Army hungered for its prey unknown to Yankee
Intelligence, and the eagle overestimated efficiency
In his foe. But when Stonewall trotted back from
Conference with Lee, Longstreet, and Stuart, he
Sucked his magic lemon: sign enough for Major
Bradley

Carleton that his ten-gun battery would soon have
Work to do. And he was right.

Bradley rode the railroad banks,
Up and down, and watched the Yanks
Mass triple lines for a big assault.
He wondered why Pope was in such fault
As to send his men in frontal attack,
Hypnotized by the lure of Old Jack,
And let Longstreet drive a sword in his back.

"Is the man's logic so utterly rank
 That it overlooks both rear and flank?
 Or is he stupidly unaware
 Of Old Dutch and Marse Robert's snare?"
 But the major's questions hung midair
 When his mount wheeled like a ballet dancer
 At a signal gun of the Federal answer:
 "Here we come, ready or not,
 To make this August hell more hot!"
 Then Bradley's horse broke into a run,
 And his rider knew they were in for some fun.
No juice, no juice from the angry sun.

Ready or not, the Federals came,
 Hot on the scent of the hunters' game,
 Not knowing that on this fatal day
 They themselves were the hunters' prey.
 As the Yankees drove the Jackson right
 And everywhere threatened a bitch of a fight,
 Bradley Carleton directed his battery
 And hadn't a thought to give to strategy—
 "They're moving further than the day before,
 Like a sheriff's hand on the leg of a whore:
 Up and up to the official rape.
 Load and fire with canister and grape!"
 The men laughed at the major's image,
 But it gave them heart for the bloody scrimmage,
 So they loaded and fired with deadly will
 And sowed Northern flesh all over the hill
 With the accuracy of point-blank kill.
 "They may beat us, but we won't run!"
No juice, no juice from the angry sun.

Through smoke clouds Bradley Carleton saw
 A repetition of war's prime law—
Kill or be killed. And he felt it good
 That his crews fought and fell where they stood,
 Rather than yield an inch of dirt to the foe.
 But help from the flank was terribly slow,
 And he wondered how long the awful show
 Could be staged for the sake of Old Jack
 Without benefit of a Longstreet attack:
 At the railroad cut the Yankees were dying
 Under Rebel clubs and stones and hideous crying
 Of the South at bay. But his cannon boomed,

And down went file on file of the doomed—
 Flaming death in the Federal faces,
 While a sergeant cut a dead mule from its traces
 And hurried up with a wagon of shot:
 "Major Carleton, sir, you can keep things hot
 For the Yankees a little while longer—
 But I wish to Christ I felt a bit stronger!"
 Bradley's face wreathed bright with a grin:
 With men like Stover, they had to win.
 "Hang on, men. We're far from done!"
No juice, no juice from the angry sun.

Northern pressure mounted to intense insane,
 And Sam Stover, with a stitch of pain,
 Saw the battle as a real live *slammer*,
 And then he was in it—a Rebel rammer
 Fell kicking the dust, a bullet in his head.
 "I'll just hang on till I know I'm dead,
 Like an old bulldog too dumb to run
 From the throat of the man with a gun."
 Then he lifted the shot and packed the powder,
 And rallied the men in a voice louder
 Than Kingdom Come: "Boys, I can tell from smell—
 The Yankees are on their way to hell!"
 The major laughed, but the major knew:
 One more assault and his guns were through.
 "The Feds are coming in a triple wave
 To break themselves or dig our grave.
 Unlimber and back a hundred and one!"
No juice, no juice from the angry sun.

As Bradley Carleton thought his resistance over,
 Longstreet threw him a four-leaf clover:
 The world burst asunder with bangs and whines
 Of enfilading fire down the enemy lines.
 The bull's batteries, from commanding ground,
 Tore Pope's troops to pieces, round after round.
 Seldom before had there been such slaughter:
 The wall of attack collapsed like water
 From a lifted and ruptured bag . . .
 "Men," said the major, "our whore's turned hag—
 Look at the goddam Yankees run!"
No juice, no juice from the angry sun.

While Brad and Sam were desperately holding
 Their position, Stonewall Jackson had sent Kyd

Douglas to Longstreet for reinforcements. The bull
 Replied to the eagle: "Certainly, but before
 A division can reach you, that attack will be broken
 By artillery." And broken it was, so completely
 That when Hood's Texans charged over the desiccate
 Hay of Manassas Plain, they trampled dead Zouaves
 Blanketing earth like piles of autumn leaves. Oh,
 The field of man was mown in season, long before
 The wild geese flew, the field of man was harvested,
 Long before the sumach reddened in the rain, and all
 Because a Northern general stumbled in the wind!

That wind was rising and the clouds were piling
 When Old Jack sent his troops pouring out
 Of the railroad cut and Longstreet swung his great
 Scythe in a three-mile arc—both wings of Lee's
 Army in grand, unutterably grand, assault:
 The eagle pivoting his left on his right, the bull
 His right on his left. The pincers of the giant
 Crab began to close from north and south, like
 An iron cracker on a hickory nut—squeeze, squeeze,
 And the tough shell broke and the ripe kernel
 Popped with tremendous force eastward: down
 The Warrenton-Gainesville-Centreville Pike,
 Through the last year's battleground, across
 Young's Branch and the stone bridge over Bull Run.
 But before that kernel could escape the maw
 Of starving Rebels on an Indian summer hunt,
 It was mashed to mealy pulp—and only darkness
 And the mists of fate prevented its raw devourment.
 Say static electricity from so much sweat
 And powder, so much metal and cloth in motion,
 Produced that rain; say it was the weeping
 Of the gods for loss of heroes, broken commands,
 Or injustice done to Porter—call the cause as you
 Will, historians to come; as twilight cast
 A blood-stained haze on field and wood, that
 Providential rain brought starless night and weird
 Fog to blot out horrid images of death and cover
 Pope's retreat, allies in his hour of need
 That forced Southern claims of victory to modify
 Themselves with failure in pursuit. Ah, Marshal
 Mud, the praise is yours! How often have you stuck
 Military genius in defeat to save a running fool!
 And yet, and yet, if you could speak, your voice

Would surely say that General Lee could have,
 And should have, bagged his foe as easily as
 An opossum shaken from a limb—if only he had stood
 For no delay from Longstreet on that afternoon
 When Pope's whole army lay open to invasion,
 Like a maiden's heart in moonlight.

10. Epilogue: To Chantilly In The Rain

Sunset and the world is dissolving in rain;
 Sunset and Stonewall Jackson rides his old line
 Of battle, his eyes blessing the hundreds of dead
 And wounded: each man down a reminder of Willy
 Preston. Sunset and a young Rebel veteran is
 Turtling a red trail of pain up an earthen bank
 Of the railroad cut; sunset and the general rides
 To the private: "Do you hurt bad, son?" The youth
 Lifts his gaze to his idol: "Yes, sir. But have we
 Whipped 'em?" Stonewall Jackson nods and
 dismounts.

"What is your regiment?" "The Fourth Virginia, sir.
 Your old brigade." There is pride in the pain.

"I've been wounded four times, but never bad as this.
 I hope I'll soon be able to follow you again."

"Pray God," says the eagle, "that I be worthy
 To lead you." Then Old Jack picks his way among
 The stones and boulders hurled by Sam Stover
 And others to beat back the Yankee attacks.

With a hand on the wounded boy's head, confirming
 Gesture of a bishop, the general says in a voice
 Thicker than coming night: "You are worthy of
 The Old Brigade, and I hope, with God's blessing,
 You soon will be well enough to return to it."

Sunset and the eagle sends staff officers scurrying
 For an ambulance and a surgeon. The Johnny Reb
 Sobs his gratitude: sunset and the world is
 Dissolving in rain. Sunset and Stonewall Jackson
 Continues his ride. . . .

Willis Hyatt did not complain
 Of a sudden world turned steady rain;
 He lay in his soggy blankets instead
 And tried to keep his thoughts from the dead,
 The dead who had set the ranks to laugh

With a fart or a sneeze, windy epitaph
 To the weeds of a hayfever season.
 But he couldn't forget poor Elmer Gleason,
 The skinny mason who'd slept at his side
 Longer than dreams of the heart were wide,
 Or so it seemed, for affection treasures
 Time differently from what a clock measures.
 Now the smile that curled like a Christmas wreath
 Was shattered by shrapnel through the teeth,
 And the tongue so sharp with stoic wit
 Forever dulled on the iron bit
 Of a hooded horseman who rode the wind
 And slashed so many Johnnies blind.
 Silent the sandy-haired hive of his skull,
 Broken to the ugly and perilous beautiful.
 But Willis Hyatt remembered the eyes
 That looked at everything under the skies
 With the light of a sun wiser than wise,
 And still he heard the philosopher say
 In the nasal twang of a happier day:
 "Love that can burn with hellish sighs
 And run for cover like a frightened rabbit
 Is at best the brave and pleasant habit
 Of telling each other wonderful lies."
 But lies or not, the poet felt
 The spikenard of prayer in his spirit melt
 At a flame of sorrow sweeter than song:
 "Elmer, my friend, you were wrong were wrong,
 For love is the ghostly touch of a hand
 That builds a rainbow bridge to stand
 Between the voids of night and night,
 Arching purely to light within light
 Until every fish in the sea shall drown
 And the tall tower of the sun break down."

The dark chill tears of a maenad pattered on
 The canvas roof of an emptied ammunition wagon;
 Inside a burly sergeant inspected his stitching
 By the smokeless light of a well-trimmed lantern:
 "It's a popper, not a banger," he said.
 "And that doc sure knows his onions. A few more
 Days and I'll be strong again." Then he laved
 The black-toothed mouth of his wound with whiskey,
 And took the sting away with a tilt of the bottle
 To his lips. "The smart is a good sign," he said.

"I'll keep me cleaner than a horseshoe at the forge."
 Fragrant-tongued Sam Stover licked a pencil
 And pained his features in the concentration
 Necessary for a letter home to Margaret. How to tell
 Brown-button-eyed beauty of his hurt so she could
 See that there was nothing in it to jangle the organ
 Harmony of serenity in her voice? Or should he
 Mention it at all? "Sometimes I wish I had more
 Muscle between my ears." He sighed: how tough
 To wrestle with ideas when the brain was light
 Enough to throw itself!

The wagon rocked slightly under boot-footed weight,
 And a lean face with neat mustache smiled into
 The weak light. "Well, Major Carleton! What brings
 You out in the weather?" "I'd like some medicine
 For memory, *lieutenant*." "Then you come
 To the right place, sir, but I ain't no *lieutenant*."
 A brawny arm fished a bottle out of the blankets
 And handed it over. Bradley Carleton squatted by
 The lantern. "You soon will be, Sam—I have
 Recommended you for battlefield commission;
 Old Jack himself will have the papers in the morning.
 That V. M. I. maid of yours is helpless as a wheel
 Without grease." The blacksmith sniffed.
 "I reckon then you seen what he's been up to."
 The major nodded and lipped his bottle. "To your
 Health, *lieutenant*." Sam clinked and grinned.
 "Wait till I tell the Missus."

An hour later the dark chill tears of a maenad
 Still pattered on the canvas, but warm laughter
 And song winged like moths about the lantern.
 The major had put his last poetic touch to Sam's
 Letter, and two new bottles clinked at every toast:
 Grief burned quietly away. "Stover, I like you.
 Very few people I do like. But I like you.
 Like you so much, in fact, that some day I'm going
 To paint you—wagons and all—with halos of lilies
 Sprouting from your mules' ears!" "That's one honor
 Them flea-bit hayburners don't deserve," said Sam.
 Then Bradley Carleton laughed, and soon his mellow
 Baritone joined rich bass in the fragrant refrain:

So, pretty girl, when you see the sky,

*And remember me—don't wet your eye,
'Cause I'm married now to Yankee rye,
And I'll drink their whiskey till I die. . . .*

Somewhere else in that rainy night,
Winslow Adams nursed a sickly light
And looked at the bruised leg of Tommy Roule:
"Kid, you don't have to go to boarding school
To know enough to pay your thanks
To this leather boot you took from the Yanks.
The bullet that hit you was almost spent,
So it didn't pierce—only made a dent.
Because of extra padding you're here with me,
And not a hospital amputee."
"Because of extra padding I'm sound of bone,
And not down flat on a table alone,
Staring into a surgeon's eyes,"
Said Tommy, grateful for rainy skies
And smoking fire and a piece of tack
And the nearness of sloping shoulders and broad
back—

Symbols of strength in his gambler friend,
Who carried the day from beginning to end.
"But, kid, lest you think because you're plucky,
You're the only gray bayonet that's lucky,
Look at my tunic—just take a peek—
And you'll see how I'm riding a winning streak
That will keep me able to breathe and feel,
No matter which blue general has the deal."
Tommy saw the hole in the blood-stained coat,
And a mouth of anguish bit his throat—
Hole in the shirt and in every card:
A blade of shrapnel had cut Adams hard—
All the way to the ace of spades. "Not yet
Will the gods of glory win their bet—
See what a dog-eared deck can do?
If it weren't for them, why, I'd be through.
But with them stacked against my heart,
Who the hell's sharp enough to part
Me from my laughing chips?"
Then Winslow Adams pursed his lips
And whistled a tune to the gathering mud,
Safe for a while from the mad flowing blood:

And if I march to a Southern rout

*And the time when I have to die,
I'll merely say that my luck ran out
And blow a kiss to the sky.*

But Stonewall Jackson did not feel like blowing
A kiss to the sky, for that night he received
Orders from Lee to cross Bull Run at Sudley's Ford,
Drive down Little River Turnpike, and cut off
Pope's retreat: no small task for the commander
Who had made the initial victory possible.
Pursuit in driving rain over giant ribbons of mud
Was hard enough for fresh troops of impeccable
Morale, but Old Jack's conquering brigades were far
From fresh and their morale was more lice-eaten
Than their homespun gray, rotten with dirt and
sweat.

Starved till sick and brutish, the Johnny Rebs
Limped after Pope—chafed and raw, footsore
And lame, their thin-blooded chills racked
With storms of diarrhea. All day Sunday, August 31,
These streaming spectral locusts fell on cornfields
Instead of on running Yankees: any kind of food
Proved better prisoners of war than sullen half-dead
Bluecoats. Monday, September 1, Old Jack, among
The enemy, toured Union field hospitals; Marse
Robert broke a wrist and sprained the other (he had
To ride by ambulance for several days), and death
Came to Federal General Phil Kearney at the
crossroads

Of Chantilly: a thousand Northern casualties, five
Hundred Southern. Thus as the starting month
Of autumn worked wet toward harvest in the too-long
Dry Virginia fields, this was the only baggage
Checked with pain before the serpentine trip
Of butternut invasion: a few red stains in the brown
Mud of Chantilly. By any military standard, surely
This small price was an immense bargain
For the escape of General Pope over the Potomac
To the safety of the Washington entrenchments.
And as the eagle rode the weather of shot opportunity
And forsaken advantage, the soldier in his
Presbyterian obedience hungered for the daring
Of command: O God of War, if only the handsome
Circus master had cracked his whip that first day
And led the ugly bull a merry dance!

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